



Russia, the Palestinians and Gaza: Adjustments after October 7th

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► Key Takeaways

- **Unbiased actor under constraint:** Over the past two decades, Russia sought balanced relations with key Middle Eastern actors. However, recent geopolitical pressures have constrained its flexibility, leading to a more asymmetrical approach to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.
- **Support for the Palestinian Position:** In multilateral forums, particularly the United Nations, Russia has largely aligned with Palestinian diplomatic narratives, while giving almost zero emphasis to the 7 October 2023 attacks carried out by the Hamas.
- **Pragmatic but Cooled Relations with Israel:** Although relations with Israel have deteriorated, they remain pragmatic. Russian elites tend to view the downturn as tactical rather than a strategic rupture.
- **Domestic Policy Dimension:** Limit public mobilization around the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, aiming to preserve domestic stability and prevent visible polarization, while using the case of Israeli military operations in Gaza to reinforce Russia's own narrative regarding the military assault in Ukraine.

Introduction

President of the United States Donald Trump invited Russian President Vladimir Putin to join the Gaza Board of Peace. The Russian leader, on the one hand, reacted positively to the initiative and to the invitation itself, and the relevant governmental agencies were instructed to conduct a detailed assessment of the political and financial implications of participation in the proposed mechanism. On the other hand, Putin suggested that the required Russian contribution of \$1 billion should be drawn from Russian sovereign assets that remain frozen in Western financial institutions. Importantly, the Russian president used this occasion to emphasize once again Moscow's declared concern for the future of the Palestinian people and for the prospects of a comprehensive political settlement.

The Soviet Union (USSR), and subsequently the Russian Federation as its internationally recognized legal successor, has consistently sought to play a visible role in efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Over the decades, however, both the intensity of this involvement and the conceptual foundations that guided it have undergone significant change. These variations reflected broader shifts in Moscow's foreign-policy priorities, in its understanding of global power dynamics, and in its perception of the Middle East's place within the evolving international system. Different historical periods were characterized by distinct strategic assumptions regarding Russia's regional role, its relations with key local actors, and the diplomatic instruments considered appropriate for advancing its interests.

This *Memo* examines the main factors that have shaped Russian policy toward Israel's war with Hamas and the subsequent regional and international ramifications of this conflict. Rather than treating Moscow's position after October 7, 2023, as an isolated and purely situational reaction, the analysis deliberately situates it within a longer trajectory of policy evolution. Particular attention is paid to structural constraints, accumulated diplomatic practices, and the changing geopolitical contexts that influenced Russian decision-making.

For analytical clarity, the evolution of the Russian Federation's position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is divided into three broad chronological phases. The first phase encompasses the period from the early 2000s until February 2022. The second spans the period from the outbreak of the war in Ukraine in February 2022 to October 2023. The third phase begins after October 7, 2023, following the launch of Israel's military operation "Iron Swords" in the Gaza Strip.

The first two decades of the 21st century

Before turning directly to the contemporary period, it is necessary to recall that the Russian Federation is the formal legal successor to the USSR. At the same time, with regard to the Middle East, Russia's position differs quite substantially from that of the Soviet Union on the issue of Palestinian–Israeli settlement. The main difference lies in the fact that contemporary Russia is not ideologically hostile toward Israel and generally seeks to build a positive and pragmatic system of relations with it, something that was not the case for the USSR, particularly after 1967, when the Soviet Union severed diplomatic relations with the State of Israel. Those relations were restored only in 1991.

Several key factors decisively influenced Russia's position on the Israeli-Palestinian settlement during this period. The first was the policy of equidistance. Moscow sought to construct a system of regional relations that would allow it to maintain stable working ties with all major Middle Eastern actors simultaneously. This approach was intended to enable Russia to present itself as an unbiased external actor, most notably through initiatives such as the Astana format on Syria, and to transmit sensitive political messages between adversaries such as Israel and Iran. The same logic applied to the Israeli-Palestinian track: Russia maintained regular contacts with both the Palestinian National Authority and Israel, and repeatedly proposed hosting direct negotiations, for example, in 2016 and again in 2017,¹ as well as offering support for similar joint initiatives in 2021.² None of these proposals was realized, however, due to a variety of political obstacles.

Russia maintained regular contacts with both the Palestinian National Authority and Israel

A second important factor was Russia's relationship with Hamas. In keeping with its equidistance policy, Moscow did not refuse contacts with the movement, which it does not designate as a terrorist organization, arguing that Hamas does not conduct operations on Russian territory. Additional justification for engagement was provided by Hamas's victory in the 2006 Palestinian legislative elections, which, from Moscow's point of view, made it a legitimate political actor. Russia hosted meetings of Palestinian factions at least in 2011, 2017, and 2019, in an effort to promote intra-Palestinian reconciliation, particularly between Hamas and Fatah, a diplomatic track that the Kremlin has long considered important.³

1. "Moscow Proposes Israel-Palestine Peace Talks", *Deutsche Welle*, August 9, 2016, available at: www.dw.com ; "Russian Invite to Host Arab-Israeli Summit in Moscow Still Stands", *Tabnak*, February 1, 2017, available at: www.tabnak.ir.

2. E. Benari, "Russia Backs PA Proposal for International Peace Conference", *Arutz Sheva* [Israel National News], January 27, 2021, available at: www.israelnationalnews.com.

3. E. Shvidler, "Hamas, Fatah Officials Meet in Moscow to Bolster Reconciliation", *Haaretz*, May 22, 2011, available at: www.haaretz.com; "Fatah and Hamas to Form Unity Government", *Al Jazeera*, January 18, 2017, available at:

A third crucial factor was the steady development of Russian-Israeli relations, which until February 2022 followed a largely positive trajectory and by the early 2020s had reached their highest level since Israel's establishment. The overall positive development of these relations over the past three decades rested on several underlying elements. First, since the early 1990s, Russia has sought to reassess many of the foreign-policy approaches adopted in the Soviet period, regarding them as excessively ideological and one-sided; relations with Israel clearly benefited from this reassessment. Second, Russia's aspiration to establish a multi-vector system of relations in the Middle East encouraged it to build pragmatic working ties with Israel. Third, Israel is home to a substantial Russian-speaking population, many of whom retain cultural, economic, and even citizenship links with Russia. This community has been perceived as a potential bridge of influence, given the presence in Israel of Russian-speaking high-level influencers. Fourth, Israel's scientific, technological, and commercial capacities have

Russia increasingly sought to present itself as an alternative political actor in the Middle East

represented an area of considerable interest for the Russian side. Cooperation developed across political, security, economic, and cultural dimensions. These trends were reinforced both by Vladimir Putin's generally favorable personal attitude toward Israel⁴ and by Israel's relatively neutral positions on sensitive issues for Russia, such as the conflicts in Georgia in 2008 and Crimea in 2014. Personal ties between

Putin and Benjamin Netanyahu played a significant role, and both leaders frequently emphasized the special nature of bilateral relations.

Another important contextual factor was Russia's relationship with Iran. While historically complex and often marked by mutual suspicion, Russian-Iranian relations during this period were largely pragmatic and tactical rather than genuinely strategic. Cooperation developed mainly in political and economic spheres—trade, arms sales, financial technologies, and mechanisms for circumventing sanctions—and was most visible during the Syrian civil war. Nevertheless, relations remained cautious, and both sides recognized the inherent limits of partnership.

Finally, relations with Western countries constituted an important background variable. Fluctuating between limited cooperation and growing confrontation, these relations steadily deteriorated in the years preceding 2022. Against this backdrop, Russia increasingly sought to present itself as an alternative political actor in the Middle East, promoting approaches distinct from those of the United States and Europe.

www.aljazeera.com; "Palestinian Factions to Oppose Trump's Deal in Russian-Sponsored Talks", Middle East Eye, February 12, 2019, available at: www.middleeasteye.net.

4. Putin generally maintains a favorable attitude toward Jews, due in part to the fact that both his beloved German language teacher and his judo coach were Jewish. He also places considerable value on Israel's position regarding the Red Army role in the Second World War. Lastly, Russian leader has appreciated Israel's willingness to develop its own relations with the Russian Federation, even when doing so has involved pressure from other countries.

Support for the Palestinian cause, engagement with Iran, and backing of the Assad government in Syria became elements of a broader Russian effort to articulate a vision of an alternative, non-Western-centered international order.

The outbreak of the Russia–Ukraine conflict

The outbreak of large-scale hostilities between Russia and Ukraine in February 2022 led to sharp qualitative changes in Moscow's geopolitical position. Unprecedented Western sanctions and a dramatically worsening external environment resulted in a significant hardening of Russian foreign policy, particularly toward the West. As the conflict dragged on, Russian official rhetoric increasingly framed the war as a systemic confrontation with the “collective West,” reinforcing Russia's self-perception as an independent pole of global power.

This shift inevitably affected relations with Israel, which is institutionally and politically part of the Western world. Within Russian discourse, expectations grew that international partners would demonstrate clearer political alignment with Moscow. Israel, however, adopted a position of limited neutrality: while expressing political sympathy for Ukraine, it refrained from joining sanctions or supplying lethal weapons, and continued to maintain diplomatic contacts with Russia. This approach was driven by pragmatic considerations, including Russia's military presence in Syria and Israel's interest in maintaining ties with the Jewish community in Russia.

The deterioration of bilateral relations was initiated largely by Moscow and manifested itself in two main areas. First, statements by senior Russian officials, most notably remarks by the foreign minister in May 2022 concerning Hitler's alleged Jewish ancestry and references to “antisemitic Jews”,⁵ were widely perceived in Israel as openly antisemitic and caused significant public backlash. These statements were interpreted in Israel as an attempt to pressure Jerusalem for its lack of support of Russia's narrative regarding the war in Ukraine, even though Israel used to support a hard anti-Nazism line anywhere (and this line was voiced as one of the major reasons for the Russian military action in Ukraine). The episode also highlighted the growing emotional dimension of the relationship, in which personal factors and mutual grievances began to play a greater role.

Tensions also arose around the activities of the Jewish Agency in Russia. Legal claims against the Agency in mid-2022, formally related to data-protection regulations, acquired clear political overtones.⁶ Although a compromise was eventually reached and the Agency continued operating, the episode demonstrated Moscow's potential leverage over Israel and contributed to a climate of mutual suspicion and cold neutrality.

5. “Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's Interview with Mediaset, Italian Television Network, Moscow, May 1, 2022”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, May 1, 2022, available at: <https://mid.ru>.

6. K. Svetlova, “Russia v. Jewish Agency: Behind Putin's Curtain”, State of Tel Aviv, September 2, 2022, available at: www.stateoftelaviv.com.

A further important development was the tactical rapprochement between Russia and Iran. Shared experience of sanctions and Iran's provision of military assistance to Russia, particularly in the form of unmanned aerial vehicles, led to deeper military-technical and economic cooperation. This process culminated in a comprehensive strategic partnership agreement that entered into force in October 2025. As a result, Russia increasingly had to take Iranian positions into account on key regional issues, including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Russia's position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict after October 7, 2023

Initial reaction

Russia's first official response to the Hamas attack on Israel was relatively restrained and cautious. On October 7, 2023, the spokesperson of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs called for the prevention of civilian casualties and reaffirmed commitment to the "two states for two peoples" formula as the only viable long-term solution. Around the same time, Moscow began preparations for a visit by Palestinian National Authority President Mahmoud Abbas.

The practical significance of this visit for conflict resolution was limited. Since Hamas expelled the PLO-led Palestinian Authority from Gaza in 2007, Abbas has had little real influence over Hamas or over developments in the enclave. The primary purpose of Russia's diplomatic activity was therefore largely symbolic: to demonstrate continued engagement in Middle Eastern affairs and support for Palestinian statehood.

While most Western leaders immediately expressed unconditional support for Israel and condemned the Hamas attack, on October 10, 2023, the Russian president stated that Israel "certainly has the right to defend itself", while again stressing the need for a political settlement. Media attention focused on an alleged comparison between the blockade of Gaza and the siege of Leningrad. Nevertheless, the overall tone of Russian statements reflected a consistent effort to avoid explicitly naming Hamas even when addressing violence against Israel.

Global arena activity

Although the United Nations (UN) has long been criticized in Russia as an increasingly ineffective organization, Moscow continues to see no viable alternative to this platform for discussing major international crises. Accordingly, on October 16, 2023, Russia submitted its own draft resolution to the UN Security Council, which failed to gain sufficient support. Its most notable feature was the complete absence of any reference to Hamas, an omission that appeared particularly striking given the brutality of the attack

on Israel. Russia subsequently maintained this approach in later diplomatic initiatives, including attempts to condemn Israel for the strike on the Al-Ahli hospital,⁷ an issue that remains highly contested.

President Putin held a series of telephone conversations with leaders of Iran, Syria, Egypt, the Palestinian Authority, and Israel, forming part of broader Russian efforts to promote de-escalation and to address the hostage issue. Throughout 2023-2025, Russia remained active at the UN, generally supporting calls for ceasefires and humanitarian access while avoiding texts that clearly assigned responsibility to Hamas.

Table 1. Russia’s activity at the United Nations with regard to the settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, October 2023-December 2025⁸

Date	Occasion/UN Action	Russian Position	Comments
16 Oct 2023	Russian-drafted Security Council resolution calling for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza failed to pass.	Yes (sponsored)	Russia’s draft omitted naming Hamas, called for ceasefire and humanitarian access; lacked 9 votes required to adopt.
25 Oct 2023	Security Council votes on two competing draft texts: the US resolution and the second Russian text.	Veto/Failed	Russia vetoed the US resolution; Russia’s own rival text also failed to secure sufficient votes.
27 Oct 2023	UN General Assembly, 10 th Emergency Special Session, adopted Resolution ES-10/21 calling for an “immediate and sustained humanitarian truce” and compliance with international law.	Voted in favour	Russia supported the GA text.
10 Dec 2023	General Assembly Emergency Special Session, Resolution ES-10/22, calling for a ceasefire, unconditional humanitarian access, release of hostages, etc.	Voted in favour	Russia was among the states voting for a broad ceasefire and humanitarian access resolution (adopted with a wide majority).
22 Dec 2023	Security Council adopts Resolution 2720 on increased humanitarian aid and opening border crossings for Gaza.	Abstained	Russia abstained on the text focused on humanitarian assistance, while citing shortcomings in addressing security and political issues.

7. “Israel-Gaza Crisis: US Vetoes Security Council Resolution”, United Nations News, October 18, 2023, available at: <https://news.un.org>.

8. UN Press releases, AP News, Reuters.

22 Mar 2024	Security Council vote on a US-led resolution demanding an immediate ceasefire in Gaza (linked to hostage deal).	Veto	Russia and China used veto power to block the US draft, arguing it was “excessively politicised” and not balanced; this satisfied neither ceasefire advocates nor political contexts.
25 Mar 2024	The Security Council adopted Resolution 2728, demanding an immediate ceasefire during Ramadan and the release of hostages after the veto of the U.S.	Abstained	Russia abstained; a Russian verbal amendment to qualify the ceasefire as “permanent” failed to gather sufficient support.
10 Jun 2024	The Security Council adopted Resolution 2735, welcoming a comprehensive ceasefire / three-phase peace implementation plan.	Abstained	Russia abstained on the resolution urging implementation of a three-phase ceasefire and hostages’ deal; it raised concerns in its explanation of the vote.
2024 (multiple dates)	The Security Council considered other related texts on humanitarian access, protection of civilians, etc.	Abstentions/ Supportive comments	Russia either abstained or supported certain humanitarian texts while pushing for “balanced language,” condemning all violence and stressing Palestinian rights; it often commented publicly in meetings.
12 Jun 2025	UN General Assembly wide-body resolution on demand for ceasefire, hostage release, and unrestricted humanitarian access passed overwhelmingly.	Support	Russia voted with the majority.
19 Nov 2025	The Security Council adopted a US draft resolution establishing a transitional Gaza stabilization arrangement (International Stabilization Force / Board of Peace)	Abstained	Russia’s foreign ministry explained the abstention, saying the text contradicted international decisions on Palestinian statehood and failed to clarify the Palestinian Authority’s role.

As demonstrated by its voting behavior, Russia pursued two principal objectives in international organizations: to minimize Hamas’s role in official discourse and to project an image of strict neutrality focused on peace and humanitarian concerns. At the same time, Moscow consistently avoided expressing any explicit sympathy toward Israel.

It should also be noted that following the weakening of Russia’s position in Syria after the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad, the Israeli-Palestinian track gained even greater importance in Moscow’s regional diplomacy. The remaining part of the conflict-

resolution process became increasingly significant for Russia, even though by the end of 2025, its overall influence in the Middle East had declined. Russia's abstention in the key UN vote on the issue (November 2025) should therefore be interpreted as a pragmatic form of limited support for international initiatives that it was unable to shape decisively.

Bilateral relations with Israel

After the initial phase of sharp rhetorical tension, relations with Israel reverted to a familiar pragmatic pattern. Embassies continued to operate, and expert-level contacts persisted, though the political atmosphere remained cool.

In December 2023, a lengthy telephone conversation took place between Putin and Prime Minister Netanyahu. According to available accounts, the exchange was difficult: Netanyahu sharply criticized Russia's stance in international forums, while Putin strongly condemned Israel's conduct of military operations in Gaza.⁹

No high-level political contacts occurred in 2024, but Netanyahu's military adviser, General Roman Gofman, visited Moscow in 2024 and again in 2025, reportedly to discuss hostages and broader regional issues. In 2025, several additional telephone conversations between the two leaders took place, including one on November 15, 2025, at Russia's initiative.¹⁰

Overall, Russia's official stance toward Israel's Gaza policy evolved in line with that of many other states: as the military campaign intensified, Russian rhetoric became increasingly critical, particularly regarding civilian casualties. At the same time, Moscow's attitude was clearly influenced by dissatisfaction with Israel's position on Ukraine. Nevertheless, many Russian experts continue to view the current cooling as tactical and potentially reversible.

Relations with Hamas and other Palestinian factions

With regard to Hamas, Russia largely continued its earlier approach of maintaining contacts and presenting itself as a mediator. After October 7, 2023, however, the public legitimization of Hamas by Russia increased noticeably. Hamas leaders visited Moscow several times, as did representatives of other Palestinian factions, including President Abbas. The central focus of these talks was the release of hostages holding Russian citizenship, a goal that was partially achieved with the release of Alexander Trufanov.¹¹

9. "Telephone Conversation with Prime Minister of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu", Kremlin, December 10, 2023, available at: <http://en.kremlin.ru>; "PM Netanyahu Speaks with Russian President Vladimir Putin", Government of Israel, December 10, 2023, available at: www.gov.il.

10. "Netanyahu, Putin Discuss Middle East in Phone Call", i24news, November 15, 2025, available at: www.i24news.tv.

11. "Russia Tells Hamas to 'Keep Promises' on Hostage Release", *The Moscow Times*, February 4, 2025, available at: www.themoscowtimes.com.

The most controversial episode occurred when the Russian president thanked Hamas for releasing Russian hostages without mentioning that the same organization had taken them captive.¹² This moment symbolized the peak of Russia's policy of legitimizing Hamas while downplaying the events of October 7th.

Table 2. Visits of Palestinian delegations to Moscow, October 2023-December 2025¹³

Date	Who visited Moscow	Met with (Russia)	General Issue	Comments
26 Oct 2023	Hamas delegation led by Musa Abu Marzouk	Deputy FM Mikhail Bogdanov	Gaza war escalation; humanitarian situation; hostages	First publicly reported Hamas visit after 7 Oct
19 Jan 2024	Hamas representatives	Deputy FM Mikhail Bogdanov	Ceasefire prospects; humanitarian access; inter-Palestinian issues	Russia emphasized dialogue with all "influential Palestinian forces"
19 Jan 2024	Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) representatives	Russian MFA officials	Ceasefire proposals; humanitarian issues	Less publicized than the Hamas meeting; treated as part of broader consultations
13–14 Feb 2024	Mahmoud Abbas, President of the PNA	President Vladimir Putin	Gaza war; ceasefire; humanitarian aid; two-state solution	High-level reaffirmation of Russia–PNA relations; Moscow stressed PNA's legitimacy
23 Oct 2024	Senior PNA/PLO officials	Russian MFA leadership	UN coordination; Gaza reconstruction; post-war governance	Focus on diplomatic coordination and future governance of Gaza
30 Oct 2024	Hamas delegation	Russian MFA leadership	Ceasefire; hostages; post-war Gaza scenarios	Reinforced Russia's mediator narrative amid ongoing fighting
3 Feb 2025	Musa Abu Marzouk (Hamas)	Deputy FM Mikhail Bogdanov	Release of hostages with Russian citizenship; humanitarian issues	Russia publicly urged Hamas to release Russian citizens
2024–2025 (various dates)	PFLP, DFLP representatives	Russian MFA / political forums	Palestinian unity; political consultations	Mostly symbolic, reflecting Soviet-era ties; limited operational impact

These diplomatic contacts were intended to demonstrate Russia's continued relevance in the Middle East and its commitment to Palestinian reconciliation.

12. "Meeting with the Trufanov Family", Kremlin, Moscow, April 16, 2025, available at: <http://en.kremlin.ru>.

13. Different media including: Reuters, *The Times of Israel*, *The Moscow Times*.

According to several public opinion surveys, Russia currently enjoys a relatively high level of trust among Palestinians compared to other external actors.¹⁴

The domestic political dimension

From a propaganda perspective, the Gaza war became a convenient instrument for shaping Russia's internal discourse on Ukraine. Russian media frequently drew comparisons between Israeli operations in Gaza and Russian actions in Ukraine, arguing that Moscow behaves more humanely.

Another important factor was the authorities' initial underestimation of growing antisemitic sentiment in the North Caucasus. In late October 2023, a wave of antisemitic incidents erupted in Dagestan and neighboring regions, culminating in the storming of Makhachkala airport by a mob seeking to attack passengers arriving from Tel Aviv. These events blurred the line between political protest and outright antisemitism. The authorities responded harshly: many participants received prison sentences,¹⁵ and public demonstrations related to the conflict were effectively banned.

Conclusion

Russia's policy toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict after October 7, 2023, combines established diplomatic practices with necessary adaptations to a sharply altered geopolitical context shaped by the war in Ukraine. Moscow largely preserved its traditional strategy of equidistance and engagement with all parties, while presenting itself as a neutral advocate of de-escalation and humanitarian relief, including direct humanitarian aid.¹⁶ At the same time, it avoided explicit support for Israel and increasingly legitimized contacts with Hamas, reinforcing its mediator narrative but also generating reputational costs, particularly in Israel and among Russian-speaking Jewish communities worldwide.

Bilateral relations with Israel deteriorated yet remained fundamentally pragmatic, with Russian elites viewing the cooling as tactical rather than strategic. Overall, Russia's post-October 7th approach reflects an ongoing effort to retain relevance in the Middle East under conditions of weakened regional influence and growing internal and external constraints.

14. "Public Opinion Poll No. 91", Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, March 20, 2024, available at: www.pcpsr.org.

15. "Russia's Investigation Committee Announced about 28 Sentences to 135 Makhachkala Airport Takeover Participants", Interfax, July 18, 2025, available at: www.interfax.ru (in Russian).

16. "Russia Has Already Delivered the 32nd Shipment of Humanitarian Aid to Residents of the Gaza Strip", Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation (Rossotrudnichestvo), November 28, 2024, available at: <https://rs.gov.ru>.

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